

Letter from the Editor

With Peter Ping Li and Liisa Välikangas

RESILIENCE, RESILIENCE, RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has the feel and characteristics of a black swan event (Taleb, 2007, 2012) – as it involves a previously unknown virus with an extremely high infection rate that can survive on inert surfaces for extended periods, outside the range of normal probabilities, and has devastating social and economic consequences. This kind of emergence of an unknown pathogen was foreseen in the World Health Organization's (WHO's) R&D Blueprint in 2016 (https://www.who.int/blueprint/about/r_d_blueprint_plan_of_action.pdf), yet the world was clearly ill prepared, and the WHO was obviously slow to recognize the gravity of this pandemic after it emerged. The new Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI; www.cepi.net), founded in Davos in 2017 as a global platform for accelerating the development of vaccines against emerging infectious diseases, is investing in the development of a vaccine to immunize against future outbreaks of COVID-19. However, it is still at an early stage of operations.

The pandemic has had the effect of freezing economies around the globe, for rich and poor countries alike. It has disrupted the established business models and global institutional alignments that underlie the coordination of international business, and it is forcing countries, enterprises, and organizations of all kinds to focus on the unprecedented challenge ahead: recovery. This challenge will be a test of resilience and of responsible leadership at the global, country, industrial, firm, family, and individual level (see, for example, MOR's recent call for proposals on Responsible Leadership).

The history of catastrophic events, such as tsunamis, hurricanes, epic wildfires, earthquakes, terrorism (September 11 attacks), and financial crises (most recently in 2007–8) and subsequent recessions, hold the promise of ultimate recovery. However, the economic and social recovery that will follow the COVID-19 crisis will assume a magnitude never experienced before, largely because this is a multidimensional global crisis, rather an isolated local disaster or a one-dimensional crisis. Hence, this raises a broad question: *How will this pandemic advance resilience in global economic and political systems while also propelling global economies forward with new strategies and institutional configurations?*

The Management and Organization Review Forum on Resilience

The July 2020 issue of MOR is introducing a Dialogue, Debate, and Discussion Forum on Resilience. Building resilience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic necessarily involves a multifaceted natural or live experiment. It also needs to involve and incorporate other dynamics that had already been advancing independently or had suddenly become visible: growing social concerns about distributive justice issues, such as income gaps; newly discovered fragility in ‘optimized’ global supply chains; overdependence on a single country for manufacturing particular goods; de-globalization forces and the emergence of regional compacts; next-generation 3D printing and manufacturing, which is at the core of the fourth manufacturing revolution; new business models enabled by advances in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and blockchain technology, and the recognition of the limited effectiveness of international economic and political collaboration, including the critical implications for the institutional legitimacy of organizations such as the WHO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank.

We believe that this is an opportune time to evaluate the current strengths and vulnerabilities. The forum is intended to explore how the resilience of the global economic system is being tested and what we are learning.

The forum invites commentators to consider which empirical data and phenomena they are examining to understand where the potential sources (or lack) of resilience might be and what the data tell them. The current crisis has led to a burst of trial-and-error experiments (e.g., online learning sprouted overnight in many countries and local jurisdictions, and people in all walks of life are working from home and using social and video tools to maintain relationships). But, at the same time, as people are mandated to stay at home unless they are deemed essential workers, cities are essentially ‘locked down’, and many businesses deemed non-essential may never recover. Which empirical data should we be observing to understand the future trends in terms of the governments, cities, industries, companies, families, and individuals? Will people return to urban centers, airports, shopping malls, public transport, and religious centers, or will they choose to remain ‘socially distant’? What might the implications be for climate change? Will the big internet companies become even more dominant? (How) Will the digital revolution accelerate in the post-pandemic era?

The concept of resilience has many different dimensions that we hope to explore in the forum. Organizational resilience in the face of adverse events or crises to recover or bounce back might entail built-in redundancy, financial reserves, slack resources, loose coupling, self-organized nimble teams, trial-and-error experiments, entrepreneurship, bricolage, and co-opetition in platforms and ecosystems for moving forward or ‘bouncing forward’. In the current situation, can all types of organizations, such as companies, hospitals, schools, and universities, build or rely on organizational resilience?

Being strategically resilient means timely, adaptive, and innovative capabilities in the face of unfolding changes and perhaps anticipating them. How do companies and countries develop or exercise strategic resilience? What new business models are being tested, what institutional configurations are countries experimenting with, and what regulatory meta-routines are being tried? Are there any interesting outliers or surprises? How are countries or local governments conveying a feeling of (epidemiological) safety and trust, satisfying the need for social interaction, and perhaps even helping develop societies with more solidarity? How does 'the great lockdown' affect governments and their role in China, the US, India, and countries in Africa? Unprecedented actions have been taken, such as the closure of borders, and in some places, we have witnessed government helplessness in the face of the pandemic. (How) Does the quest for recovery and new resilient capabilities strengthen autocratic regimes or liberal democracies? Will borders be as open as they were before? What will people in these countries/continents demand of their government going forward? What is being learned, if anything, about the nature of risk vs. uncertainty? How does the ongoing natural experiment advance our conceptual understanding of resilience or reveal new structural and cultural changes in the future in employment relationships, employment security, the nature of work, the role of business in society, and new responsible leadership? If a vaccine were discovered tomorrow, what would be the implications for scaling up global production and prioritizing who is vaccinated?

Questions abound. Where are we, as researchers, looking for preliminary answers and new ways of conducting research urgently and rapidly?

The MOR forum on resilience will lead off with an examination of country-level and organization-level resilience and will feature phenomenon-based empirical or theoretical commentaries, including case studies, micro narratives of responsible leadership and accounts of outlier outcomes, grounded in extant knowledge and the current context in transforming markets. The forum is seeking diverse commentaries that will be evaluated through a new experimental two-week fast track review process.

Please submit commentaries (maximum 2000 words) via the MOR online submission system [here: https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mor](https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mor). When asked to select an article type, please select the Dialogue, Debate, and Discussion category and note in your cover letter that you are submitting a commentary to the 'Forum on Resilience' to ensure that your submission is properly assigned.



References

- Taleb N. N. 2007. *Black swan: The impact of the highly improbable*. London: Penguin.
Taleb N. N. 2012. *Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder*. New York: Random House.